EXHIBIT 17

DECLARATION OF DR. ROBERT J. JONES

I, Dr. Robert J. Jones, declare as follows:

1. I am the Chancellor at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign (the "University") in Urbana-Champaign, Illinois. I have held that position since September 26, 2016. I am also a vice president of the University of Illinois System. Before joining the University, I served as president of the State University of New York at Albany for approximately three years and nine months from 2013 to 2016.

2. As Chancellor at the University, I have personal knowledge of the contents of this declaration or have knowledge of the matters based on my review of information and records gathered by University personnel and could testify thereto.

3. The University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign is a university within the University of Illinois System, which is overseen by the Board of Trustees of the University of Illinois. The Board of Trustees is a body corporate and politic established by the Illinois General Assembly (110 ILCS 305).

4. The University receives substantial annual funding from the National Science Foundation ("NSF"). In Fiscal Year 2024 (July 1, 2023 – June 30, 2024), the University had 501 unique Principal Investigators ("PIs") receiving NSF funding. The University has been a top recipient of NSF funding over the last five years. In Fiscal Year 2024, the University had total expenditures of $129,288,449 in NSF funding. In Fiscal Year 2024, the University received $63,503,379 in new NSF awards.

5. The funding the University receives from NSF supports critical and cutting-edge research vital to our nation's security, advancement of national health, prosperity, and welfare, and

the progress of science. Millions of Americans benefit from and depend on this research. For example:

a. The Institute for Geospatial Understanding through an Integrative Discovery Environment (I-GUIDE) has developed an AI-powered open science platform that enables researchers to harness massive geospatial data to tackle a range of complex socioeconomic and environmental challenges—including aging dam infrastructure in the U.S., extreme events and disaster resilience, and food and water security. In addition, I-GUIDE has filled a critical gap in open educational resources and curriculum for geospatial data-intensive sciences, helping to prepare the next generation of workforce and leaders in geospatial AI and data science.

b. NSF funding enables the University to provide computing resources to researchers across the nation, especially for research into effective, understandable, and trustworthy AI. This work includes ways to train AI models while preserving data privacy, better ways to detect AI-generated "deepfake" audio and video, and more efficient methods to train AI systems. These systems also train the next generation of AI researchers and users.

c. Alliance for Socially-acceptable and Actionable Plants (ASAP) is a University-led consortium to develop cutting-edge applications of AI, robotics, and synthetic biology that will accelerate how crop biotechnology can be used to deliver growth in the U.S. agricultural economy and food security. The project also trains a next-generation workforce that has the multidisciplinary skills needed for America to maintain its preeminence in biotech innovation.

d. The NSF AI Research Institute for Molecule Synthesis develops frontier AI tools for discovery and manufacturing of drugs and materials, which enables America to maintain its world-leading position in broad AI for Science area. This work also supports the training and preparation of the nation's next-generation scientific workforces who are well versed in chemistry and AI.

e. The University's involvement in the National Artificial Intelligence Research Resource (NAIRR) Pilot is establishing policy and executing resource allocations to support research AI by all Americans enabling the country to maintain technological dominance in AI.

f. The NSF Illinois Biofoundry Center is a national research infrastructure that integrates engineering biology, AI, and laboratory automation to accelerate the discovery and manufacturing of bioproducts, which enables America to maintain its world-leading position in the biotechnology industry. This work also supports the training and preparation of the nation's next-generation scientific workforces who are well versed in biology, AI, and automation.

g. The University's involvement in the NSF's Advanced Cyberinfrastructure Coordination Ecosystem: Services & Support (ACCESS) program provides critical research computing resources and services to the national research community. Funded by all US agencies, it provides the broad availability and innovative use of an agile, integrated, robust, trustworthy and sustainable research support ecosystem that can drive new thinking and transformative discoveries in all areas of science and engineering research and education.

Many of these projects would not be able to continue without the support ACCESS provides.

h. The Cybershuttle project is a collaborative research project creating a seamless, secure, and highly usable scientific research environment that integrates all of a scientist's research tools and data. Cybershuttle provides the nation with seamless access to distributed scientific software, data repositories, storage resources, analytical tools, and heterogeneous computing resources. The platform addresses all technical challenges associated with access to a range of resources and user environments and increases user productivity.

i. Through NSF-funded research, the University is advancing the accuracy of biological research through innovative statistical and machine learning models. We also train the biological research community across America in national software schools highlighting the project software and enables the nation to maintain its position as the leader in computational biology and bioinformatics research.

j. The University's involvement in very large-scale computing resource development and deployment focuses on bringing critical research applications onto contemporary GPU-based computing platforms and prototyping a practically useful quantum computing resource.

k. LabEscape, our science-based escape room, has provided scientific exploration to over 15,000 people, introducing them to the enormous potential of quantum processing.

6. The University intends to apply for new funding awards, and renewals and continuations of existing funding awards, in the next year and in future years to come.

7. For example, the University has recently submitted or intends to submit proposals on the following NSF projects, either as the lead institution or a subawardee:

a. The Hybrid Quantum Architectures and Networks (HQAN) is focused on advancing the new science of modular quantum computing. Quantum computing is a critical technology to U.S. competitiveness in areas as diverse as energy, pharmaceuticals, and information security. Modular quantum computing has been recognized as a pathway to utility scale and achieving market, societal, and national security impact. HQAN supports research teams lead by 45 faculty at the University, the University of Wisconsin Madison (UW), the University of Chicago (UC), and Stanford University comprised of 90 graduate students, 17 postdocs, and 24 undergraduate students. HQAN has been widely successful and produced an enormous volume of cutting-edge science, including more than 100 publications in peer-reviewed journals and seven patents. This research program serves as a critical workforce pipeline for the nation. More than 15 junior researchers who were involved in HQAN science are now in faculty and postdoc positions at universities, and more than eight are now working in leading U.S. quantum companies.

b. The University is a potential subawardee on two pending, multi-institutional NSF grant proposals: (i) NSF Engine: Biobased Rural Innovation for Domestic Growth and Economic Security (BRIDGES) and (ii) NSF Engineering Research Center for Advancing Innovation in Renewable Co-Products and

Aviation Fuel Technologies (AIRCRAFT). Both seek to underpin rapid, large-scale development of the U.S. bioeconomy via scientific advancement, while training the next generation of scientists. Without this type of funding, the new miscanthus cultivars developed by University researchers could not be tested for a wide range of potential industrial uses or further engineered to produce valuable biochemicals.

c. Declarative Network Troubling shooting in the Modern Era: Computer networks underlie all aspects of our modern society, forming the backbone of critical infrastructures from the power grid to financial networks and much more. These infrastructures are continuously under attack, with high profile cyberattacks, ransomware, and data leaks directing trillions of dollars annually into the pockets of criminals and threatening our national security. Our nation's adversaries continue to grow in their sophistication, with recent advances in AI rapidly accelerating their ability to uncover every possible flaw and exploit them at the speed of light. The University's proposal comprises a fundamental advance in our ability to protect computer systems, by creating "provable" network infrastructures. By integrating formal verification techniques with AI-based reasoning, we can construct network protocols and algorithms that are secure by design and continuously verifiable in real-time. Central to our approach is the use of declarative logic programming (e.g., Answer Set Programming (ASP) and Prolog) to model, analyze, and debug complex and real-world network behaviors that defy traditional approaches. In addition to creating real, practical technologies that can address the urgent and growing

threat of cyberattacks on critical infrastructure, as well as advancing fundamental science behind both AI and computer security (providing strong alignment with national strategies such as the National Cybersecurity Strategy and the recent AI executive orders), and "explainable" AI (directly assisting efforts in AI governance and corporate and government strategy) our outcomes are designed train a new generation of cybersecurity professionals with deep expertise on leveraging AI to defend computer systems, as well as providing crucial and direct support to our nation maintaining leadership in AI.

d. The University cleared an initial pre-proposal competition for an NSF-sponsored Engineering Research Center (ERC) on Smart Manufacturing Equipment (CSME) to perform the research, drive the innovation, and develop the human resource to realize and sustain a new generation of AI-enabled manufacturing machines. Advanced manufacturing machines are critical to our national economy, especially in this technologically defined global economy, because they ultimately define what can and cannot be produced in it. This ERC represents an opportunity to leverage the strong investments the U.S. has made, as well as the lead it has in high-bandwidth communications, computing, and artificial intelligence into regaining its preeminence in manufacturing machines, a technology that is so critical to U.S. manufacturing, security, and economy. Without this work, we lose the opportunity to educate and train at least 75 Ph.D. degree students, 100 M.S. students, and influence the education of several hundred undergraduate and associate degree students, who would build, transform, and sustain this critical technology in the future.

8. Reimbursement of the University's incurred indirect costs is essential for supporting this research. NSF's cutting of indirect cost rates to 15% would preclude carrying out the kinds of research projects described in paragraphs 5 and 7 in the future.

9. Indirect costs include construction and maintenance of state-of-the-art laboratories and other facilities required to meet the current technical requirements of advanced research, and procurement and maintenance of equipment necessary to conduct such research, such as specialized testing environments, precision instrumentation and laboratory safety systems.

10. Physical facilities costs are one of the largest components of indirect costs. This includes not only the usual costs of constructing and maintaining buildings where research occurs, but the very high costs of outfitting and maintaining specialized laboratory space, which can require special security, advanced HVAC systems, and specialized plumbing, electrical systems and waste management, as well as specialized laboratory equipment. The features and amount of space available to researchers have a direct and obvious impact on the nature and amount of research that can be done at the University. Planned construction, facility maintenance, and other infrastructure activities supporting the critical research and innovation described herein would be at risk.

11. In addition, indirect costs fund the administration of awards, including staff who ensure compliance with a vast number of regulatory mandates from agencies such as NSF. These mandates serve many important functions, including ensuring research integrity; protecting research subjects; properly managing and disposing of chemical agents and other materials used in research; managing specialized procurement and security requirements for sensitive research; managing funds; preventing technologies and other sensitive national security information from being inappropriately accessed by foreign adversaries; providing the high level of cybersecurity,

data storage, and computing environments mandated for regulated data; ensuring compliance with specialized security protocols and safety standards; maintaining facility accreditation and equipment calibration to meet research quality and security standards; and preventing financial conflicts of interest.

12. Recovery of the University's incurred indirect costs is based on predetermined rates that have been contractually negotiated with the federal government.

13. Through Fiscal Year 2025, the University's predetermined indirect cost rate is 58.6%.

14. The effects of a reduction in the indirect cost rates to 15% would be devastating. In Fiscal Year 2024, the University had total expenditures of $129,288,449 in NSF funding, including $97,452,569 in direct costs and $31,838,880 in indirect costs, with the 58.6% indirect rate applied as mandated by federal policy to the modified total direct cost ("MTDC"). Over the next five years, the University anticipates receiving an average of approximately $130 million per year from NSF for annual direct costs. Based on the predetermined indirect cost rate of 58.6% and applying that rate to the direct costs (as modified pursuant to the CFR), the University reasonably expects to receive approximately $31 million in indirect cost recovery on an annual basis over the next five years.

15. If—contrary to what the University has negotiated with the federal government—the indirect cost rate was reduced to 15% for new awards, that would significantly reduce the University's anticipated annual indirect cost recovery. For example, applying the 15% rate to the total modified direct costs on the University's entire NSF portfolio based on Fiscal Year 2024, the University's anticipated annual indirect cost recovery would be reduced by approximately $23 million, from $31 million to approximately $8 million per year. The University anticipates the

15% rate cap would apply to a vast majority of the University's NSF portfolio within a matter of years.

16. Our sister institution, the University of Illinois Chicago ("UIC") also has significant NSF funding and would be harmed by the rate cut. In Fiscal Year 2024, UIC had total expenditures of $31,641,456 in NSF funding, including $23,121,711 in direct costs and $8,519,744 in indirect costs, with the indirect rate applied as mandated by federal policy to the MTDC, not the total direct cost. For example, applying the 15% rate to the total modified direct costs on the University's entire NSF portfolio based on Fiscal Year 2024, UIC's anticipated annual recovery would be reduced by approximately $6 million.

17. This reduction would have deeply damaging effects on the University's ability to conduct NSF research from day one. Most critically, it will necessarily and immediately result in staffing reductions. Many of the University's current research projects will be forced to slow down or cease abruptly if forced to apply for renewals at the 15% indirect cost cap. This will also necessarily and immediately result in staffing reductions across the board.

18. The University has for decades relied on the reimbursement of indirect costs. And until now, we have been able to rely on the well-established process for negotiating indirect cost rates with the government to inform our budgeting and planning. Operating budgets rely on an estimate of both direct and indirect sponsored funding to plan for annual staffing needs (*e.g.*, post-docs, PhD students, and other research staff), infrastructure support (*e.g.*, IT networks, regulatory compliance, and grant management support), and facility and equipment purchases. And in some cases, the University has long-term obligations to supporting the research enterprise, and it relies on budgeted grant funding, including associated indirect cost recovery, to fulfill these commitments. This multi-year budgeting process also assumes the availability or possibility of

grant renewals at roughly similar terms – and certainly at the negotiated indirect cost rate – as had been previously available.

19. In addition to the immediate effects and reliance interests described above, dramatically cutting indirect cost reimbursement would have longer-term effects that are both cumulative and cascading, which include potential safety issues from lack of staff/security and the inability to restart projects even if funding were restored.

20. Disruptions to the University's research will also have negative effects in the Urbana-Champaign area, the state of Illinois, and the broader region. The University employs thousands of Illinois residents and collaborates with state and local partners to help solve regional challenges through joint research and innovation. The University's research also fuels spending in the regional economy, including by driving discoveries that launch new ventures, attract private investment, and make a positive social impact. A substantial reduction in the University's research budget would immediately and seriously jeopardize these contributions to the local region and the overall economy.

21. Finally, slowdowns or terminations of research by this University, as well as other American universities will allow competitor nations that are maintaining their investments in research to surpass the United States capabilities, threatening both our Nation's security and its economic dominance.

22. The University cannot cover the incurred expenses itself. While the University maintains an endowment, it is not possible for the University to use endowment funds or other revenue sources to offset shortfalls in indirect cost recovery:

a. Much of the University's endowment is restricted to specific donor-designated purposes, such as scholarships, faculty chairs, and academic programs. The

University is not legally permitted to use those funds to cover research infrastructure costs, or any costs beyond what the gift agreement permits.

b. The portion of the endowment that is unrestricted is subject to a carefully managed annual payout to ensure long-term financial stability.

23. The University reinvests nearly all of its other revenue into mission-critical activities, leaving little margin to absorb unexpected reimbursement gaps. The University does not generate surpluses, nor does it have funds that could be redirected without impacting core academic priorities such as educational programs and financial aid support for students.

24. Forgoing the reimbursement of expenses incurred that would result from accepting a lower indirect cost rate would create long-term unsustainable and indefensible budget pressures on the University, which would in turn force reductions in key investments supporting the University's faculty, students, staff, research, and teaching infrastructure, as well as other critical activities needed to maintain the University's academic excellence.

25. If the University elects to not apply for NSF grants due to the new indirect cost rate cap – the University's federally funded portfolio would be reduced by roughly 21%. That greater loss in funding from NSF would mean additional significant cost-cutting measures would need to be adopted and would immediately impact personnel. The university would have to withdraw all existing pending proposals, and, over time, the existing NSF portfolio would have to be closed. Cutting back on the University's research in computer networks, cyberinfrastructure, biological infrastructure, energy storage, quantum computing, optical materials, space manufacturing, and superconducting circuits, among other areas, will also have severe, pervasive, and potentially devastating long-term implications for national security and the American economy.

I declare under penalty of perjury that the foregoing is true and correct.

Executed on May 5, 2025, at Champaign, Illinois.

Dr. Robert L. Jones